

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME TWENTY-FIVE, NUMBER ONE

FALL 2016

ANTHONY DI RENZO TO BE KEYNOTE SPEAKER AT SINCLAIR LEWIS CONFERENCE 2017

The Sinclair Lewis Society, in association with the Sinclair Lewis Foundation, announces that Anthony Di Renzo will be the keynote speaker for the Lewis in Business and Politics Conference in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, July 19–21, 2017. Di Renzo is best known in Lewis circles as the editor of *If I Were Boss: The Early Business Stories of Sinclair Lewis*, an important collection of short stories on business that Lewis wrote between 1915 and 1921. Some of these atti-

tudes toward business are evident throughout Lewis's novels as well, including *The Job* (1917), *Babbitt* (1922), *Dodsworth* (1929), and *Gideon Planish* (1943). Di Renzo is currently an associate professor in the Department of Writing at Ithaca College.

This conference will celebrate Lewis

as a commentator on American society and his continued importance in American literature in the 21st century. 2017 is the 90th anniversary of Elmer Gantry and the 70th anniversary of *Kingsblood Royal*. Scheduled speakers include Steven J. Michels, author of *Sinclair Lewis and American Democracy* and George Killough, editor of *Minnesota Diary, 1942–46* by Sinclair Lewis.

We welcome papers on any aspect of Lewis studies. The Conference will be held in conjunction with Sauk Centre's annual Sinclair Lewis Days. There will be a variety of panels on Lewis's work, feature films based on Lewis's novels, and a tour of the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home. Accommodations are available throughout Sauk Centre, including at the Palmer House where Lewis worked as a young man.

Abstracts of papers are due by April 1, 2017 but are welcomed earlier. For more information, please e-mail Sally Parry at separry@ilstu.edu.



BERKELEY REPERTORY THEATRE'S ADAPTATION OF *IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE*

Ralph Goldstein

California State University–Los Angeles

What would Sinclair Lewis now think of San Francisco, across the bay from Berkeley, where an adaptation of his novel *It Can't Happen Here* recently opened? The median rent for a two-bedroom apartment is over \$4,000. Service employees earning an average of \$15 an hour struggle to keep up with the cost of living and commute long distances due to the lack of affordable housing in the city. Longtime tenants are evicted to make room for luxury condos, purchased in many instances by new owners who shuttle to Silicon Valley and back in private buses. Once a solidly union town, San Francisco has become

— Berkeley Repertory Theatre continued on page 8

THE LOW-DOWN ON LEWIS

Frederick Betz

Southern Illinois University–Carbondale

In her letter of October 25, 1927, to Alfred Harcourt, Grace Hegger Lewis wrote: “Have you seen Charlie Shaw’s almost scurrilous vignette of Hal in the last *Vanity Fair*? As he only knew Hal during that insane period last winter, his deductions are undoubtedly fair, but I do hate the idea of them being incorporated in a book” (Smith 256). She alludes here to a contribution by Charles Green Shaw to *Vanity Fair* for November 1927 entitled “Three Americans. Exceedingly Personal Glimpses of Sinclair Lewis, Texas Guinan and Clarence Darrow.” Without identifying or discussing Shaw’s profile of Lewis, Mark Schorer quotes only Shaw’s comment that Lewis was “constantly making plans that never materialize” and cites,

— The Low-Down continued on page 10

IN THIS ISSUE

FEATURE ARTICLES

- 1 Anthony Di Renzo to Be Keynote
Speaker at Sinclair Lewis Conference 2017
- 1 Berkeley Repertory Theatre's Adaptation
of *It Can't Happen Here*
by Ralph Goldstein
- 1 The Low-Down on Lewis
by Frederick Betz
- 3 Is Sinclair Lewis "Not Much Read" Anymore?
by Ralph Goldstein
- 4 Lewis and Roth on American Dictators
- 5 Translation and Culture: *Main Street* Goes to China
by Sally E. Parry
- 6 *It Can't Happen Here* Staged Readings
Sweep the Nation
- 7 The Runestone of Alexandria and Sinclair Lewis
- 9 What Were They Reading Then?:
Calling Dr. Nietzsche: A Review of *Portrait
of a Man with Red Hair* by Hugh Walpole, 1925
by Sally E. Parry

DEPARTMENTS

- 3 Contributors
- 7 New Members
- 18 Sinclair Lewis Queries
- 19 Sinclair Lewis Notes
- 21 Sauk Centre News
- 23 Collector's Corner

The SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter is published twice a year with help from the Publications Unit of the English Department at Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240.

Editor: Sally E. Parry

Publications Unit Director: Steve Halle

Production Director: Holms Troelstrup

Intern: Kara Hamilton

Please address all correspondence to: Sinclair Lewis Society, c/o Sally E. Parry, Department of English, Box 4240, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-4240

OFFICERS OF THE SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY

PRESIDENT

Frederick Betz
Southern Illinois University
at Carbondale

SECRETARY-TREASURER

Robert L. McLaughlin
Illinois State University

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ted Fleener
Waterloo [Iowa] Public Schools

George Killough
College of St. Scholastica

Quentin Martin
University of Colorado—Colorado Springs

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Sally E. Parry
Illinois State University

HONORARY BOARD MEMBERS

John-Paul Sinclair Lewis
Author

Patricia Lewis
Sinclair Lewis Foundation

Richard Lingeman
Author, *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street*

Joyce Lyng
Sinclair Lewis Foundation

IS SINCLAIR LEWIS “NOT MUCH READ” ANYMORE?

Ralph Goldstein
California State University–Los Angeles

Senator Berzelius “Buzz” Windrip, a diminutive but nagging presence in the American political subconscious since Sinclair Lewis created him as the dictator of his futuristic novel *It Can't Happen Here*, has risen in the wake of Donald Trump's candidacy to nightmarish prominence. At the time of this writing, a Google search of the character's name combined with that of Trump yields over two thousand results, featuring articles calling attention to Lewis's foresight in 1935. Googling the novel's title and Trump brings up ten times that number, and the quote famously but not certainly attributed to Lewis, “When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross,” produces over 400,000 results, many of them recently posted.

This revival of interest, with or without Donald Trump, is not surprising. Provoked by the first part of an observation by Azar Nafisi, a Senior Fellow at Johns Hopkins University, in her 2014 book *The Republic of Imagination: America in Three Books*, “While Sinclair Lewis is not much read in English classes or by book clubs today...,” I set off to learn more about Lewis's place among present-day readers. The durability of Lewis's literary reputation has been an ongoing question for me since the early '90s when, after reading *Babbitt* for the first time, I was puzzled as to why Lewis is less anthologized and assigned than other American Nobel laureates. I can still recall the galvanizing moment outside the public pool north of Los Angeles where my children were taking swimming lessons, looking with dismay at bulldozers carving up the pristine San Gabriel Mountain foothills above the park for the purpose of creating a gated community of 275 putatively luxurious homes, and, returning my attention to my paperback copy, coming upon the depiction of George in 1920, complementing the roar of the nearby earthmovers, that “he was nimble in the calling of selling houses for more than people could afford to pay” (2). That Lewis's novel nimbly sends up features of American life

still recognizable today is evident in the second part of Nafisi's declaration: “*Babbitt* has had a long afterlife” (203).

However, for an example of fresh critical animus against Lewis, notice the snarky, dismissive review of Nafisi's book in the *New York Times*, which includes juvenile interjections such as “Huh?” and “Well, duh,” condemnation of one of Nafisi's assertions as “looniness,” and disdain not only for Nafisi's “sympathy with both Sinclair Lewis and his poor, pathetic butt of a satiric character,” but also for what reviewer Wendy Lesser calls Lewis's “willfulness” as a kind of literary faux pas. So when Lesser asked in her critique if we need to hear thoughts about consumerism from a literature professor, I wondered what she and other critics think are appropriate views to convey in serious literary discourse. For a start, I logged onto the online version of the Spring 2015 edition of the *Threepenny Review*, which the Harvard-trained Ms. Lesser edits from Berkeley, home of the late Mark Schorer, and found among other offerings a poem on the anti-depression drug Zolofit, a prose reflection on dirty laundry, and a vigorous colloquy among six commentators on Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*.

That wasn't very helpful. I turned next to Harvard professor and influential *New Yorker* magazine critic James Wood, who can be caustic at times but at least behaves like an adult. In the preface to his 2008 book *How Fiction Works*, Wood defines fiction as “both artifice and verisimilitude, and that there is nothing difficult in holding together these two possibilities” (xiii). Fair enough. Especially in his Zenith novels, Lewis meets that test, but Wood is no fan of social realism. In a blog post to upbraid a reviewer of his book who believed otherwise, Wood snapped, “I pay the greatest attention to ‘stylistic flourishes,’ examine them, and revel joyfully in them.

—— Is Sinclair Lewis “Not Much Read” *continued on page 14*

CONTRIBUTORS

The editor of the Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter would like to thank everyone who contributed to this issue by writing articles or sending in notes.

Thanks to Ron Beach, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Frederick Betz, Ralph Goldstein, GU Kai, George Killough, Jackie Koenig, Richard Lingeman, Joyce Lyng, Robert McLaughlin, Dave Moore, Susan O'Brien, Dave Simpkins, Tom Steman, Mary Stroeing, and Jessica Wozniak.

LEWIS AND ROTH ON AMERICAN DICTATORS

In the essay, “How does Donald Trump stack up against American literature’s fictional dictators? Pretty well, actually,” Sinclair Lewis’s *It Can’t Happen Here* and Philip Roth’s *The Plot Against America* anticipate a Trump-like leader—and challenge how we would respond. Carlos Lozada (*Washington Post*, June 9, 2016) compares the two novels in light of the election. Here are the highlights.

Americans have seen this leader before. Boastful, deceptive, crudely charismatic. Dabbling in xenophobia and sexism, contemptuous of the rule of law, he spouts outlandish proposals that cater to the lowest instincts of those angry or frightened enough to back him. He wins the nation’s top office, triggering fears of an authoritarian, even fascistic US government.

Normally, though, this leader resides safely in the pages of American fiction....

In particular, two novels depicting homegrown strongmen have become ways to interpret Trump’s campaign and to imagine his presidency. Sinclair Lewis’s *It Can’t Happen Here* (1935) features a populist Democratic senator named Berzelius “Buzz” Windrip who wins the White House in the late 1930s on a redistributionist platform—with a generous side order of racism—and quickly fashions a totalitarian regime purporting to speak for the nation’s Forgotten Men. Salon.com has dubbed it “the novel that foreshadowed Donald Trump’s authoritarian appeal,” while Slate.com’s Jacob Weisberg writes that you can’t read the book today “without flashes of Trumpian recognition.”

Philip Roth’s *The Plot Against America* (2004) offers a similarly harsh vision of that era, imagining the slow implosion of a working-class Jewish family when the Republican party nominates aviator Charles Lindbergh for the presidency in 1940. The victorious Lindy strikes a pact with Hitler, launches federal programs that break apart and resettle Jewish communities, and promotes anti-Semitic thuggery. “Roth’s novel could use another reading in light of the very real possibility that Trump might be the Republican nominee,” David Denby wrote in the *New Yorker*. “The counter-factual may be merging into fact just as virulently as Roth imagined.” Reading these works in this moment, it is impossible to miss the similarities between Trump and totalitarian figures in American literature—in rhetoric, personal style, and even substance. Yet the American-bred dictators are

not the true protagonists. Ordinary citizens, those who must decide how to live under a leader who repudiates democratic values and institutions, are the real story. They must choose: Resist or join? Speak up or keep your head down? Fight or flee?

If Trump is elected and the fears of those crying “fascism” materialize, it is those characters and their choices that become especially relevant. In Donald Trump’s anti-America, what would you do, and who would you be?

* * *

The trappings of fictional strongmen will be familiar to anyone who has observed US politics in the unimaginable year since a reality-television star took a Trump Tower down-escalator to launch a presidential bid. There’s the obligatory *Art of the Deal*-style manifesto. In *It Can’t Happen Here*, Windrip has a best-selling book, *Zero Hour*—“part biography, part economic program, and part plain exhibitionistic boasting”—that is required reading among the faithful. The leader also delivers awful yet captivating speeches. Doremus Jessup, the aging, small-town newspaper editor and hero of Lewis’s novel, marvels at Windrip’s “bewitching” power over large audiences. “The Senator was vulgar, almost illiterate, a public liar easily detected, and in his ‘ideas’ almost idiotic.” But he captivates supporters, addressing them as if “he was telling them the truths, the imperious and dangerous facts, that had been hidden from them.”

Much as Trump claims that only he is tough enough to restore national glory, in *The Plot Against America* Lindbergh is hailed as a “man’s man who gets the impossible done by relying solely on himself.” Republican Party leaders despair over Lindy’s refusal to take any of their wise advice on how to run his campaign. Defenders believe that Lindbergh’s strength of personality will enable him to strike deals—great ones, the best ones—with the world’s bad guys. “Lindbergh can deal with Hitler, they said, Hitler respects him because he’s Lindbergh.”...

The dictators whom Roth and Lewis conjure share the intolerance underlying Trump’s most controversial proposals—banning Muslims from entering the United States, building a wall straddling the US-Mexico border, deporting millions of undocumented

— Lewis and Roth on Dictators *continued on page 16*

TRANSLATION AND CULTURE: *MAIN STREET GOES TO CHINA*

Sally E. Parry
 Illinois State University

I've been in email conversation recently with GU Kai, a teacher at Anhui University in China who is translating *Main Street* into Chinese. I certainly would find it a daunting task, partly because of the difference in culture, and partly because *Main Street* was written nearly a hundred years ago. Sinclair Lewis, who was known to have a wonderful ear for how real people, especially Midwesterners, talked, and an eye for the details, the artifacts that were part of the culture of the time, created a snapshot of an era that must be hard to convey adequately in another language. Professor Kai is writing explanatory notes for the translation, especially in regard to cultural phenomenon, and emailed me for help. I thought that readers of the *Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter* might be interested in some of the aspects of American culture that Professor Kai had questions about and my answers.

Quote 1: "While they were shyly rustling the paper costumes she disappeared. Ten minutes after she gazed down from the stairs upon grotesquely ruddy Yankee heads above Oriental robes, and cried to them, 'The **Princess Winky Poo** salutes her court!'" (78).*

Q: Here, I want to know who is "Princess Winky Poo?"

A: There was no real Princess Winky Poo. The reference is a sly one, a nod towards Gilbert and Sullivan's comic operetta *The Mikado*. Notions of the Orient during that time were shaped by that sort of popular culture. So when Carol appears in Japanese costume, she feels like she is taking on this identity, but in a comic sort of way.

Quote 2: "Carol kicked off her silver slippers, and ignored the universal glance at her arches. The embarrassed but loyal Vida Sherwin unbuttoned her high black shoes. Ezra Stowbody cackled, 'Well, you're a terror to old folks. You're like the gals I used to go horseback-riding with, back in the sixties. Ain't much accustomed to attending parties barefoot, but here goes!' With a whoop and a gallant jerk Ezra snatched off his elastic-sided **Congress** shoes" (77).

Q: Here "Congress" seems to be a shoe brand that has disappeared with time going on, but I could find no information about the history of the brand.

A: Congress shoes were first manufactured in 1837. They were leather shoes with elastic on the side and a tab in back for ease of pulling them on. They were very common, especially for middle-class professionals. They were manufactured until about 1900 and were also called Congress

gaiters. They would have been considered old-fashioned at that point in the novel.

Quote 3: "Carol leaned over the rail of the bridge to look down at this **Yang-tse** village; in delicious imaginary fear she shrieked that she was dizzy with the height; and it was an extremely human satisfaction to have a strong male snatch her back to safety, instead of having a logical woman teacher or librarian sniff, 'Well, if you're scared, why don't you get away from the rail, then?'" (16).

Q: "Yang-tse village" refers to the village like those beside the Yangtze River of China?

A: It does, although the implication is that it was a foreign-seeming place, different than what she was used to. I don't think that the comparison is very strong between the village referenced above and a real village on the banks of the Yangtze River.

Quote 4: "Flat against the wall of the second story the signs of lodges—the Knights of Pythias, the Maccabees, the Woodmen, the **Masons**" (35).

Q: Origin of "the Masons"?

A: The Masons originally existed as a guild in medieval England and later turned into a fraternal order, probably around the end of the 17th century. The earliest Masonic lodges in the United States were established in the early 1700s.

Quote 5: "The others tried to look literary. Harry Haydock offered, 'Juanita is a great hand for reading high-class stuff, like 'Mid the Magnolias' by this **Sara Hetwigginn Butts**, and 'Riders of Ranch Reckless.' Books" (51).

Q: Who is "Sara Hetwigginn Butts"?

A: This is a made-up name, making fun of female romance writers with three names.

Quote 6: "Even while they were removing their overshoes they were peeping at the new decorations. Carol saw Dave Dyer secretly turn over the gold pillows to find a price-tag, and heard Mr. Julius Flickerbaugh, the attorney, gasp, 'Well, **I'll be switched**,' as he viewed the vermilion print hanging against the Japanese obi" (74).

Q: "I'll be switched" means "oh my God!"?

A: The colloquial term expresses wonder or amazement. It would be used in polite company, unlike "oh, my God," which wouldn't.

Translation and Culture *continued on page 17*

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE STAGED READINGS SWEEP THE NATION

On October 24, 2016, there were nationwide readings of Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, newly adapted for the stage by Tony Taccone and Bennett S. Cohen for the Berkeley Repertory Theatre. There were 20 theaters, 12 universities, 12 libraries, a high school, a coffee house, and four in-home readings in the 24 states that participated.

This event attempted to mirror the excitement felt by theatergoers on October 27, 1936 when the first version of the play, written by Lewis and John C. Moffitt, was produced as part of the WPA Federal Theater Project's "Living Newspaper" series in 21 theaters in 18 cities across the United States, as another presidential campaign was drawing to a close.

The new adaptation slyly draws attention to the parallels between 1936 and today. Below is part of the prologue.

The management of the theatre wants you to know that any resemblance of the events in the play to current events is purely coincidental. It is true that in 1936 there were

- Race riots in our cities,
- A vast income gap between the rich and the poor,
- A major drought in several states,
- A right-wing extremist running for president,
- Millions of new immigrants,
- And foreign wars creating global terror...

But that's where the similarities end. We urge you to reserve judgment before making any hasty historical parallels.

A press release from the Berkeley Rep notes,

Lewis's novel reads like it was ripped out of today's headlines. Whether he's describing Buzz Windrip, the demagogue who wins the presidency based on the promise of making our country great again, or Doremus Jessup, a liberal newspaper editor who simply waits too long to take Windrip seriously, Lewis's understanding of our political system was



Lorinda Pike (Connie de Veer) asks Doremus Jessup (Dean Brown) what he plans to do after Buzz Windrip is elected. From the reading at Illinois State University.

precise and far-reaching. Reading the book now is somewhat shocking, if only because it's impossible to dismiss our current situation as an aberration.

Susan O'Brien attended the reading in Keene, NH, by the Hourglass Readers at the Keene Public Library.

The auditorium was nearly full, after the librarian had told me that usually 'we don't get many people for such offerings.' . . . The cast and performance were wonderful. . . . I found the play to be quite unsettling and almost eerie in its direct connection to the corrosive situation in the U.S. today.

The Sinclair Lewis Society co-sponsored a reading with the School of Theatre and Dance, College of Fine Arts, at Illinois State University. Professor of Theatre Lori Adams, who co-directed the reading, cast students, alumni, and members of the faculty. In the article "*It Can't Happen Here Comes to Campus*" by Gianna Pinotti (*Vidette* Oct. 20, 2016: 3) Adams said, "When the opportunity arose to present the staged-reading of *It Can't Happen Here*, I felt the need to explore the responsibility that we as citizens have. I'm also struck by how something written so many years ago can still ring so true in 2016."

Sally Parry, executive director of the national Sinclair Lewis Society, noted, "*It Can't Happen Here* is as important now as it was in 1936. It shows that voting has serious consequences. Being an informed citizen and taking an intelligent part in the political process is vital to preserving our democracy."

The language of the play eerily prefigures the current presidential campaign. In a rousing speech, days before the

election, Windrip tells his followers, "You are officially forgotten no more" and says, "Anger...fueled our Revolution. We are harvesting that anger." Jessup's son tells him that even if he and his friends don't like Windrip, they need to understand why others support him. "The truth for you may not be the same truth for the average man," he said. ☞



Doremus asks his family, wife Emma (Cyndee Brown), daughter Mary (Colleen Rice), and son-in-law Fowler Greenhill (Danny Rice), whether their family should escape to Canada. From the reading at Illinois State University.

THE RUNESTONE OF ALEXANDRIA AND SINCLAIR LEWIS

This entry is based on a Sinclair Lewis listserv discussion—thanks to all who participated, especially Dave Moore for initiating the conversation, Dave Simpkins for providing context, and George Killough, whose response below is very thorough.

Dave Moore wrote on the Lewis listserv: Seems to me Red was working at the newspaper there [in Sauk Centre] around the time of the unveiling of the Kensington Runestone. Have you ever found an inkling of his opinion of this mysterious object, which its supporters say has historical significance?

Hard to imagine him sparing the chance at sarcasm. Or having George Babbitt or Lowell Schmalz marvel at its wondrousness...

and it CAN happen here.

Dave Simpkins: I've been through *Main Street* many times and haven't noticed anything on the Runestone.

I'm a true lefse-loving Norwegian but I think the stone is a joke. If it would have been found by a German it would be much more believable than being found by a Norwegian that wrote in Runic.

George Killough: Lewis's *Minnesota Diary*, which he was keeping from 1942 to 1946 during his effort to put down roots again in his home state, mentions the Kensington Runestone, though he doesn't say much about it.

During the summer of 1942, Lewis was renting a house on Lake Minnetonka, just west of Minneapolis, and he would take long weekends to drive around the state to savor the scenery and try to decide where he might want to settle permanently. He had an extended trip on Sunday, May 17 to Tuesday, May 19. First he headed to Sauk Centre, eventually got as far west

as Inspiration Peak, then circled back east to Brainerd, then back to Mille Lacs Lake, continued east so as to approach the Twin Cities from the north, went through Marine on St. Croix and White Bear Lake and then home.

The evening of Sunday, May 17 he gave a speech at the Congregational Church in Sauk Centre, his family's church, which was celebrating its 75th anniversary.

In the diary entry for May 18, when he passes through Alexandria, he has this short paragraph:

"Kensington Rune Stone kept in vault, Alex Chamber of Commerce. Inscription seems too shallow to last. Where did they get chisel?" (*Minnesota Diary, 1942-46*, 81)

This is all he says in this diary about the Runestone. He's skeptical, as we would expect, but brief.

The teenage diary may say something, but I don't remember any mentions in Schorer's transcription (both the diary text and the transcription are in the archive at Yale). The teenage diary starts in November 1900, and the Kensington Runestone came to light in 1898, so it would not have been fresh in the news during the time of that diary.

If anybody can find other mentions of the Runestone in any Lewis writings, I will be interested. This does seem like the kind of material Lewis would have loved to use for satire. ✍



*Images of the two carved faces of the Kensington Runestone, from George Flom's short book *The Kensington Rune-Stone: an address* (Illinois State Historical Society, 1910).*

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to the new members who have joined the Sinclair Lewis Society since the last issue.

Leanne Bradshaw-Daniels
Vancouver, WA

James Holmes
Dallas, TX

Berkeley Repertory Theatre *continued from page 1*

what some call a metaphor for income inequality: a company town for high-tech corporations discouraging unionization. The city's wealth disparity is not a glaring exception to its surrounding communities. In findings by the nonpartisan California Budget and Policy Center published this year in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the top one percent of income earners in the greater metropolitan area "made 44 times more than everyone else."

My guess is that Lewis might find parallels here with the situation he documented in "Cheap and Contented Labor," his 1929 coverage of industrial unrest in Marion, North Carolina. And he might look upon the philanthropy of tech billionaires with the same skepticism he evoked in *Gideon Planish*. Lewis was not a stranger to the Bay Area. In 1909 he lived down the peninsula in what was then the bohemian artists' colony of Carmel-by-the-Sea, where median home prices now exceed a million dollars, and he later worked for a San Francisco newspaper before returning to the East Coast.

Home of the University of California's flagship campus, Berkeley has a long history of political activism. In 1969 Governor Ronald Reagan ordered the National Guard to quell a protest over a disputed piece of campus property. Barbara Lee, currently representing the district in Congress, was the only member of the House to vote against the use of force following the 9/11 attacks. This year's leading "mainstream" mayoral candidate would likely be seen as far left in many other places.

Berkeley was also the home of the late Mark Schorer, author of the 1961 generally negative biography of Lewis, about whom UC Berkeley Professor Emeritus Frederic Crews commented, "Why bother oneself further with a man who was so contemptibly understandable as a product of his callow and bumptious age?" But such criticism did not deter Berkeley Repertory Theatre from relying closely on Lewis's novel in their current adaptation. So far, audiences have been filling up the 600-seat venue, and the community's enthusiastic reception of the play will no doubt spark a resurgence of interest in Lewis and his work.

Following perfunctory reminders about exit locations and shutting off cellphones, there are announcements about the cast's racial makeup reflecting modern reality, about roles being

played by people who would not have played them in the Federal Theatre Project's productions, and, facetiously, about resemblances between events in the

play with current events—riots, income gaps, drought, immigration waves, right-wing extremism, global terror—being purely coincidental.

Knowing the story in advance is helpful, as the play moves briskly along the narrative thread, resulting in some double-cast characters coming in and out quickly and not being well defined. Nevertheless, Tom Nelis, who plays Doremus Jessup, provides sufficient gravitas, his lust for Lorinda Pike clear, his disagreement with son Phillip poignant, his insistence that there are no perfect political solutions vibrant. And in a crucial moment near the end when Doremus points his hat at us, emphasizing his regret for having lived too comfortably in a circumscribed world to take action against the threats that destroyed it, we overwhelmingly white, respectably groomed and clothed audience members, with the resources to pony up \$45–\$97 for a ticket, must wonder as well if we're doing enough to deal with the urgencies of our day.

Interestingly, one of the novel's key terms—"Respectables"—does not appear in the play. Neither is there any mention of the racial restrictions Lewis imagined, and only a few of the anti-Semitic comments remain. A single, oblique reference is made to Lee Sarason. Not much rhetoric from Windrip's *Zero Hour* finds its way into the script, but at different times a chorus of the ensemble members advance the narrative with political commentary and observations about events related to Doremus and his family. At the performance I attended, lines about building a wall 3,000 miles across the



Logo for the Berkeley Repertory Theatre's production of Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*. Adapted by Tony Taccone and Bennett S. Cohen, and directed by Lisa Peterson. (Photo courtesy of the Berkeley Repertory Theatre.)

————— Berkeley Repertory Theatre *continued on page 10*

WHAT WERE THEY READING THEN?
CALLING DR. NIETZSCHE: A REVIEW OF *PORTRAIT OF A MAN WITH RED HAIR*
BY HUGH WALPOLE, 1925

Sally E. Parry
 Illinois State University

An occasional feature on books that were popular when Sinclair Lewis was writing.

Hugh Walpole (1884–1941) was relatively contemporaneous with Lewis, writing his first novel in 1909. A very popular writer in the 1920s and 1930s, he was praised by Henry James, John Buchan, and Ernest Hemingway during his lifetime, although by the early 1940s his style and subject matter were considered old-fashioned by most critics and readers. He was a distant relative of Horace Walpole, best known for the Gothic tale *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Hugh Walpole wrote 36 novels, as well as short stories and plays, and also worked briefly as a scriptwriter for MGM, adapting the novel of *David Copperfield* (he also appears briefly as the vicar in the 1935 film).

Portrait of a Man with Red Hair was published in 1925, the same year as *Arrowsmith*. However, in some ways they seem like they were written in different centuries. *Portrait* is a sort of Gothic tale, narrated by an American, Charles Harkness, who spends most of his time wandering around Europe with little purpose in mind. He has no friends and feels disconnected from life. The things that he most appreciates are some etchings, seven of which he travels with, including Whistler's *Drury Lane* and Rembrandt's *Flight into Egypt*.

At times he sounds a little like Lewis: "Away from America, how deeply he loved his country! How clearly he saw its idealism, its vitality, its marvelous promise for the future, its loving contact with his own youthful dreams. But back in America again it seemed crude and noisy and materialistic. He longed for the Past" (23–24). He also seems like the older Sam Dodsworth of *World So Wide* (1951). Harkness was like "so many other... wandering American cosmopolitans that nobody had any permanent feeling for him—fathered by Henry James, uncled by Howells, aunted (severely) by Edith Wharton—one of a million cultured, kindly impersonal Americans seen as shadows by the matter-of-fact unimaginative British" (28).

Harkness is called to act rather than react when it is suggested to him by a man at his club that he visit Treliss, a small

coastal town in Britain, for their annual festival. While exploring the hotel that he's checked into, he overhears a young man and woman arguing. Later that day he is invited to dinner by Crispin, a man with shockingly red hair, a soft and melodious

voice, very pale skin, and weirdly boneless hands, who shares his interest in etchings. The young man is Crispin's son, who seems to be slavishly devoted to his father. Hesther, young Crispin's wife, is terrified of her father-in-law, who enjoys exerting power over others, even when it causes pain, which he thinks builds character. As young Crispin tells Harkness, "My father beat me one night terribly, beat me so that I could not move for pain. For no reason, simply because, he said, he wished that I should understand life, and first to understand life one must learn to suffer pain, and that then, if one could suffer pain enough, one could be as God—perhaps greater than God" (164). The

question for Harkness becomes: Is Crispin crazy or really evil?

Harkness is enlisted by Dunbar, a man who has loved Hesther for years, to help Hesther escape. While waiting in the fog with Hesther, Harkness tells her of his disassociation from the world, "longing for Europe and the old beautiful things when I was in America, and longing for the energy and vitality of America when I was in Europe. That's what it is to be really cosmopolitan—to have no home anywhere" (220).

Although the escape is successfully accomplished, Harkness, Dunbar, and Hesther are all recaptured by Crispin and his Japanese servants. The men are taken to a tall tower, where their clothes are removed and they are tied up. The older Crispin, dressed in white silk pyjamas, appears with a knife and starts to make many little cuts on their bodies with death as the presumable outcome for the victims. An older fisherman, who is also tied up in the same room, breaks his bonds like a modern Samson, and throws Crispin out of the tower window.

—————What Were They Reading Then? *continued on page 18*



Berkeley Repertory Theatre *continued from page 8*

border and about a business magnate becoming “the most distinguished statesman in all the land” provoked knowing laughs from the audience, but the loudest roar came when Doremus responds to Dimick’s New Underground ruse by saying, “I always knew I was underinsured.”

The production is sensually vibrant, with actresses’ hair conforming to 1930s styles; with confetti falling on the audience during the convention scene, a huge Big Brother-like Windrip banner in the background; with gunfire and book burning; and with cast members in the final scene rolling out and operating a small printing press, confident about the future

of free expression. At play’s end, the audience showed its appreciation with an enthusiastic standing ovation.

Afterward, a small group met for a docent-led discussion, during which there was agreement on the high quality of the production and alarm at how closely it addresses current conflicts. Some people wanted a couple of plot points clarified, and several expressed curiosity about Lewis, his background, and what motivated him to write the novel. Berkeley Rep’s overall attention to Lewis’s story and the interest it’s generating outweighs, at least in the mind of this member of the Sinclair Lewis Society, any qualms about what the play’s creators left out. ✍

The Low-Down *continued from page 1*

among other plans that were in the making in mid-March 1927, Lewis’s conversations with Ramon Guthrie about a projected novel to be called *The Man Who Sought God*, the “labor novel” that was never written (484).

Shaw’s profile does not appear to be mentioned anywhere else in Lewis scholarship although it does have some similarities to Lewis’s “Self-Portrait (Berlin, August, 1927)”; a carbon copy of which was found among his papers at Thorvale Farm after his death in January 1951 and which was published in *The Man from Main Street* (45–51). The editors of that volume guessed in 1953 that it was written for his German publisher, Rowohlt Verlag in Berlin, and noted that there was no record of its ever having been printed (45). In his biography of Lewis, Schorer thought that “the whole or parts of the sketch appeared in German newspapers,” and that here Lewis recognized “some of his follies but none of the important ones. He attributes to himself qualities that he did not conspicuously possess, notably a steady loyalty to friends, and he neglects qualities that he conspicuously had, notably an uncritical gregariousness and concomitant loneliness” (490).

Shaw’s “Three Americans” quite likely drew on an interview or conversations he must have had with Lewis in winter 1926–27. Lewis’s father, Dr. Edwin J. Lewis, had died on August 29, 1926, and after the funeral Lewis went to Washington, DC, where Grace had rented a house for them. Here Lewis intended to finish *Elmer Gantry*. But their marriage was collapsing, and, deeply depressed, Lewis began to drink uncontrollably. “Until this point,” as James Hutchisson notes, “he had always kept the place where he wrote—whether it was an office, bedroom, or hotel suite—an alcohol-free zone; he had observed a clear distinction between working hours and drinking hours. But according to recollections of Mencken, Harcourt, and others who were in contact with him

that autumn, Lewis was drinking heavily while he wrote the latter half of *Elmer Gantry*” (151). Indeed, Mencken would recall years later, in his letter of October 16, 1945, to Lewis, that the “last 30,000 words” of the novel were produced “in a state of liquor” (*Letters of H. L. Mencken* 490–91).

By the end of 1926, Lewis was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and was barely able to finish writing *Elmer Gantry*. He might have been unable to do so, “had Alfred Harcourt not recognized what terrible shape Lewis was in and put him in a sanitarium in upstate New York. There, Lewis dried out and was able to shore up some weak sections in the last few chapters” (Hutchisson 151). A memorandum to Alfred Harcourt and Donald Brace, dated December 17, 1926, indicates that Lewis had come earlier that month to New York and left the manuscript of *Elmer Gantry* with Harcourt. Harcourt and Brace both wrote to Lewis on December 27th to tell him that the novel was “splendid” (Harcourt) and “amazingly good” (Brace) (Smith 228–29). Lewis went back and forth between New York and Washington before sailing for England on February 2nd (Smith 230–32).

Shaw’s profiles of Lewis, Guinan, and Darrow were modeled on profiles in *Pistols for Two*, written by Mencken and George Jean Nathan, co-editors of the *Smart Set*, using the mutual pseudonym of Owen Hatteras. These mock-biographical sketches of each other were described by Carl Bode as “pointillistic, with each fact a dot” (62). We see people, as Hatteras explained at the beginning, “not as complete images, but as processions of flashing points” (qtd. in Bode 62).

The Low-Down by Shaw was published in March 1928, and contained 24 profiles, most of which had appeared in

The Low-Down *continued on page 11*

Vanity Fair, the *Bookman*, and the *New Yorker*. In his Foreword, dated January 27, 1928, Shaw cited not the influence of Owen Hatteras, but rather Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous detective Sherlock Holmes, whose advice was to "never trust to general impressions," but rather to "concentrate yourself upon details," for it was, as Shaw notes, "by the apparently trivial that the really important is most effectively deduced" (v). Shaw wrote that he "endeavored to present a collection of portraits depicting the basic philosophies and beliefs of those included, but a projection of their most casual phases and subconscious leanings, as well" (v-vi).

Profiled (each introduced with a portrait drawing by *New Yorker* cartoonist Peter Arno) were defense lawyer Clarence Darrow; composer and music critic Deems Taylor; actress and producer "Texas" Guinan; heavyweight boxing champion Gene Tunney; journalist, writer, and editor H. L. Mencken; drama critic and editor George Jean Nathan; tennis player Helen Wills; artist and illustrator George Luks; critic, writer, and translator Ernest Boyd; stage and screen actress Lillian Gish; naturalist and author William Beebe; composer and pianist George Gershwin; author F. Scott Fitzgerald; screenwriter, playwright, and author Anita Loos; multimillionaire businessman Hermann Oelrichs, Jr.; sculptor Paul Manship; editor and journalist Herbert B. Swope; poet, playwright, and theater actress Blanche Marie Louise Oelrichs (under the pseudonym "Michael Strange"); Sinclair Lewis; artist Robert W. Chanler; dancer, actress, and singer Adele Astaire; newspaper publisher Cornelius Vanderbilt IV.; and boxing promoter Tex Rickard.

In his Foreword, Shaw did not categorize his 24 subjects in the usual manner, that is, by profession or occupation, but rather by personal features, traits, or other odd details. "There are no graduates of Harvard" among the group. "All have crossed the Atlantic Ocean at least twice, two are ambidextrous, one was born in Brooklyn," and "it is whispered that four are about to commit matrimony." Moreover, "thirteen are brunettes, eight are blonds, three are redheads...Two weigh over two hundred pounds, one weighs under a hundred...Six are non-smokers, nine have been divorced... four stand over six feet, one stands under five." Finally, "seven do not use their middle name," and "none is a member of the United States Senate." "By their idiosyncrasies, in fine," Shaw tells the reader, "ye shall know them" (vi).

Shaw's profiles were likewise idiosyncratic. The category "Profile" had been coined by the early *New Yorker* staffer James Kevin McGuinness, and Profiles (always capitalized) in the *New Yorker* were "characteristically brief and arch, with an emphasis on getting an acute 'angle' on the subject" (Yagoda

133). Fiction editor Katherine Angell wrote to a prospective contributor, "We want the main biographical facts brought in incidentally but the most important thing is to give an intimate picture of the man—something more intimate and personal than the average Sunday magazine newspaper write-up." The emphasis was on getting a sidelong rather than a direct view. Sometimes, Ross told another potential Profiler, "it is not even necessary to see the subject himself at all" (qtd. in Yagoda 133).

By contrast, Shaw was a "minimalist" (see Pennington and Kramer), whose paintings were influenced by cubism and abstract expressionism, and whose poetry was influenced by Japanese *haiku* and *cinquain*. Shaw's most ingenious piece of minimalist writing is perhaps "The Bohemian Dinner," a wry list of 56 unnumbered sentences, each constructed of only two to five words, which captures his experience of attending a "bohemian dinner" in Greenwich Village, evoking the loud atmosphere of a Washington Square restaurant and distilling the dinner down to the little details of setting, food, drink, and the sartorial affectations of his fellow diners. The list, held in the Shaw Papers at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, is undated, but since Shaw lived in New York in the 1920s and '30s, writing primarily for the *New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair*, it seems likely that "The Bohemian Dinner" dates from those years.

Similarly, Shaw's profiles of his "twenty-four subjects" in *The Low-Down* consist of seemingly random lists of biographical facts, physical characteristics, interests, preferences, pet likes and dislikes, idiosyncrasies, and other details, which could only have been elicited in personal interviews or from questionnaires or requests for such detailed information, as suggested by Mencken's letter of December 2, 1927, in which he appears to be responding to Shaw with "a few notes" (*Letters* 305-07). Shaw's profile of Lewis consists of 65 unnumbered notes, which are arranged in no logical order, and which are often incomplete, unexplained, or cryptic, and often combine unrelated particulars, or odd juxtapositions or contrasts, all reflecting Shaw's minimalist approach to his subject.

Shaw begins by noting simply that "Sinclair Lewis, son of Edwin J. and Emma (Kermott) Lewis, was born in Sauk Center [sic], Minnesota, on February the seventh, 1885" (237). Only in note 63 does Shaw disclose that Lewis "possesses two nicknames—'Red' and 'Hal,'" adding, that "in his home town he is called 'Harry'" (245). In note 48, Shaw discloses that Lewis is "the son of a physician," and then makes the unrelated

observation, “at one time, [Lewis] acted as an editor for a publishing house” (243). After noting Lewis’s birth, Shaw observes that, “He possesses enormous nervous energy which carries him—at lightning speed—up to a certain point. At that point he sometimes wilts, suddenly and without a struggle” (237).

“When wishing to be really swank,” Shaw notes, Lewis will appear in “a high wing collar, a polka-dot bow tie, and pale *piqué* spats,” but contrasts these details of fashionable or pretentious attire with the general observation: “Otherwise he dresses like a gentleman” (237). In the fifth note, Shaw combines the literal measurement of Lewis’s height and a metaphorical description of his face: “He stands over six feet in his stockings and has the complexion of a New Bedford skipper” (237). Mark Schorer would later observe simply that Lewis “was nearly six feet tall before he was sixteen” and that he had “a puffy, acne-ridden face” (3). In note 17, Shaw returns to another facial feature by observing that Lewis’s “eyes, the color of a spring sky, glisten with great brilliance” (239), while Schorer would later note his “ice-blue eyes (astigmatic) rather protruding” (3). In other commentary on Lewis’s clothing, Shaw observes that Lewis “owns a handsome green plush Tyrolian hat—complete with feather—presented to him by his spouse [Grace]—though it is seldom that he flaunts it... He looks best in evening raiment” (239). In note 59, “He favors suspenders rather than a belt and most of the time will carry a cane... Now and then he boasts a monocle” (244). After all of this, “He is still able to laugh at himself” (244).

Lewis, Shaw notes next, “is a tip-top mimic and is constantly giving imitations.” He makes further comment on Lewis’s use of dialect and language: “From a rich Minnesota argot, without a second’s pause, he is able to switch into a Whitechapel Cockney—much to the annoyance of all present. He also knows German and French” (237–38). In his “Self-Portrait (Berlin),” Lewis had noted about himself in the third person that, “He imitates an American Babbitt boasting about his motor car, a Swede or a Yankee speaking German, a college professor lecturing ponderously on nothing in particular” (47). In note 40, Shaw comments that Lewis is particularly devoted to Germany and “is proud of his knowledge of German... He admires anyone who is proficient in languages, and in whatever country he finds himself, he will tackle the language entirely by sounds that suggest it” (242).

In the 28th note, Shaw returns to Lewis’s verbal virtuosity: “He will frequently talk for hours and on the lecture platform is most effective. Certain of his anecdotes will consume a whole evening” (240). A good example of this is Lewis’s creation of Lowell Schmaltz. Mencken had encouraged Lewis

in 1927 to write up the long monologue that he had been reciting, often while drunk, at parties, “supposedly spoken by an imbecile Rotarian who claimed some sort of acquaintance with Calvin Coolidge, then President” (*My Life* 330). In January 1928, Mencken published Lewis’s monologue in the *American Mercury*, under the title Mencken claims to have given it, “The Man Who Knew Coolidge.”

Shaw notes that Lewis’s “first novel was ‘Our Mr. Wrenn,’ published in 1914” (238), but makes no mention here or in any subsequent note of *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, or *Elmer Gantry*! Four entries later, Shaw notes that Lewis is “the author of a poem of which he is very proud” (238). Shaw does not identify the poem, but only adds that “it is not a long poem” (238). In note 55 he says that Lewis “believes that anyone who wants to write sufficiently will do so, despite all obstacles.” He adds that Lewis “himself has been writing since the age of eight” (244), which would date to 1893, well before Lewis started keeping a diary in 1900 (Schorer 23) and announced in 1901 “the birth of the writer: ‘Started to write a ragtime poem’” (Schorer 35). Without mentioning that Lewis had gone to Yale, Shaw, who was also a graduate of Yale, reports that in college, Lewis “was looked upon as a good deal of a crank... He worked his way through, doing newspaper chores at night” (238). The revelation that Lewis “has always been fascinated by the degree of Doctor” (238) would be fulfilled by his alma mater in 1936 (Schorer 617, 620).

Food and travel are recurring themes. In the 11th note, Shaw reports that Lewis “loves chop suey, though frequently enough, he will go without any dinner at all.” He then adds: “When not on a book, he is nearly always traveling” (238). In other notes, Shaw returns to both Lewis’s tastes in food and drink and his restlessness. In note 18, Lewis “is extremely fond of milk and is wild about traveling” (239). Note 27 reports: “With gusto he will explore strange restaurants, always seeking a new note in gastronomic art. He also has a yen for beer halls. His taste in chow, however, depends almost entirely upon his mood. He does not like Japanese waiters” (240). Note 56 reports that “He is particularly fond of old wines, but is not much on Holland gin” (244). Two notes further, Lewis “dislikes all varieties of formal shindigs, but is partial to little neck clams on the half shell” (244). In note 15, “His pet cigarettes are Lucky Strikes, though he is able to smoke almost anything” (239).

Few of Shaw’s notes relate to Lewis’s marriage. In note 57, Shaw reports that Lewis “has been married only once”

(244), although does not mention Grace by name. She wrote to Alfred Harcourt on October 25, 1927, “He is unable to settle anywhere and, although liking the comforts of home life, is unwilling to put up with its annoyances” (242). In note 62, Shaw had reported: “Some day [Lewis] hopes to settle down, though where he hasn’t the vaguest idea. His idea of genuine happiness is intellectual conviviality” (244–45). Indeed, in the meantime, Lewis had met Dorothy Thompson in Berlin and asked Grace for a divorce (Schorer 488). In March 1928, the same month Shaw’s *The Low-Down* was published, Grace went to Reno, Nevada to sue for divorce; on April 16th, it was granted (Schorer 499). Lewis married Thompson on May 14th in London.

Lewis’s personal traits, often contradictory, and writing habits would, however, prevent him from ever settling down and finding genuine happiness. In note 14, “he is essentially high-strung” (239). “The greatest of egotists,” in note 47, “he is able to work solely according to his own methods and will not for an instant brook the interference of others” (243). In note 44, “He works and talks at a breakneck speed” (242). “He is happiest,” in note 21, “when up to his ears in work and will now and then knock off six thousand words a day” (239). “He will,” in note 33, “sometimes work for ten hours without stopping” (241). In note 39, “he finds it hard to work in New York” (242). In note 42, “He is highly conscious of his worth and is at once irritated by those who cannot appreciate his ability” (242), but note 31 reports that, “At times he despises himself” (241). In note 24, “He enjoys playing jokes” (240), and in note 26, “He can draw a pretty good caricature of himself” (240). But note 52 reports that, “He is terribly sensitive” (243). “Save when at work or asleep,” in note 53, “he cannot stand being alone” (243). “At 11:45 P.M.,” in note 25, “he is invariably drowsy, though, soon after, he may attain the crest of the wave” (240), and “he is,” in note 46, “an incredibly early riser” (243). “At an instant’s notice,” in note 23, “he is able to recall the most trifling details of incidents long past,” and “he makes notes, as a rule, on the backs of envelopes” (240). As reported in note 49, Lewis “almost never writes long-hand but does practically all his work on the typewriter” (243). “The plots,” Shaw observes in note 38, “for most of his stories he first tries out on his friends,” and: “He is always full of plots, but cannot write a play, knowing little of the technique of the theatre” (242). “Gladly would he,” Shaw reports in note 36, “delve into the field of business—as he would plan a book—purely as an experience,” without mentioning Lewis’s early business stories (see *If I Were Boss*), but hinting at “Lewis’s lifelong and obsessive interest in hotel-keeping” (Schorer 597), which

would be realized in *Work of Art* (1934), generally considered to be one of his weaker novels of the 1930s (Parry 96).

It is clear that Lewis liked to be the center of attention. In note 34, “He likes parties and wants people to make a big fuss over him. Strangers, to whom he shines, he will address by their Christian name one minute after making their acquaintance” (241). Moreover, in note 60, “he likes introducing people to one another” (244). In note 37, “he enjoys occupying the centre of the stage” (241). Note 51 reveals that, “Half-child, half-man, the child will often oust the man, during which state pampering, coddling, and extreme care are absolutely necessary” (243). Note 50 reports: “With ever an eye for the spectacular, he rejoices in producing surprises. They are, moreover, always the most spectacular of surprises...Fundamentally, he is very kind” (243). In note 61: “His prejudices are many, his recreations few.” For example: “He visits the theatre once in a dog’s age...He never hesitates to express an opinion—regardless of whom or with what it may deal” (244).

The tension between Lewis’s attitude towards the United States and his Anglophilia is evident in several entries. Note 20 reports that he “is thoroughly disgusted with modern American manners” (239). In note 45, Lewis “prefers Europe to America, though he will defend the land of his nativity with vigor the second a foreigner attacks it” (242). In note 30, “He admires anything well done and is, above all, fetched by the mode of living as practiced by the English gentry” (241). Moreover, Lewis is, in note 32, “impressed by titles, likes British clothes, and is proud of being a son of Old Eli (although a believer in the European system of education)” (241). When last in England, as Shaw reports in note 19, “Philip Guedalla declared that unless he [Lewis] were immediately recalled to the United States there would be war between the two countries” (239). As recollected by George Jean Nathan in 1932, Guedalla, a prolific British travel writer and biographer, made this declaration in a conversation with Lewis’s collaborator in writing *Arrowsmith*, Paul de Kruif, at a party in London in spring 1923, after complaining about speeches Lewis had been making in England belaboring “the shameful failure of the English critics [...] to take a proper interest in American literature” (Nathan 15; see also Schorer 370).

The minimalist Shaw’s final note 65 aptly summarizes Lewis as “a mass of contradictions” (245). We’ll leave the last word to the first Mrs. Lewis. In her 1955 memoir, *With Love from Gracie*, Grace writes “He wanted Fame and he wanted

The Low-Down *continued from page 13*

Love and he had both, but he found they were not enough... That he was capable of honest self-analysis is evident in his several 'Self-Portraits.' But as early as 1927 he was beginning to superimpose the man he was becoming upon the man he had been, and the picture is out of focus" (333–34).

Works Cited

- Bode, Carl. *Mencken*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1969.
- Hatteras, Owen [pseudonym for H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan]. *Pistols for Two*. New York: Knopf, 1917.
- Hutchisson, James M. *The Rise of Sinclair Lewis, 1920–1930*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996.
- Killough, George. "German Catholicism, Sauk Centre, and Sinclair Lewis." *American Literary Realism* 39.2 (2007): 109–25.
- Kramer, Hilton. "Art View: Charles Shaw—in the Minimal Tradition." *New York Times* Feb. 21, 1982.
- Lewis, Grace Hegger. *With Love from Gracie, Sinclair Lewis: 1912–1925*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955.
- Lewis, Sinclair. *If I Were Boss: The Early Business Stories of Sinclair Lewis*. Edited by Anthony Di Renzo. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1997.
- . "The Man Who Knew Coolidge." *The American Mercury* 13.2 (Jan. 1928): 1–21.
- . "Self-Portrait (Berlin, August, 1927)." *The Man from Main Street: Selected Essays and Other Writings: 1904–1950*. Edited by Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Cane. New York: Random House, 1953. 45–51.
- Lingeman, Richard. *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street*. New York: Random House, 2002.
- Maule, Harry E., and Melville H. Cane, editors. *The Man from Main Street: Selected Essays and Other Writings: 1904–1950*. New York: Random House, 1953.
- Mencken, H. L. *Letters of H. L. Mencken*. Edited by Guy J. Fougue. New York: Knopf, 1961.
- . *My Life as Author and Editor*. Edited by Jonathan Yardley. New York: Knopf, 1992.
- Nathan, George Jean. *The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan*. New York: Knopf, 1932.
- Parry, Sally E. "Sinclair Lewis: The Darkening Vision of His Later Novels." Dissertation, Fordham University, 1986.
- Pennington, Buck. "The 'Floating World' in the Twenties: The Jazz Age and Charles Green Shaw." *Archives of American Art Journal* 20.4 (1980): 17–24.
- Schorer, Mark. *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961.
- Shaw, Charles Green. "The Bohemian Dinner." Charles Green Shaw Papers, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, New York.
- . *The Low-Down*. New York: Henry Holt, 1928.
- . "Three Americans. Exceedingly Personal Glimpses of Sinclair Lewis, Texas Guinan and Clarence Darrow." *Vanity Fair*, Nov. 1927, 68, 114. An edited version printed in *Vanity Fair: Selections from America's Most Memorable Magazine: A Cavalcade of the 1920s and 1930s*. Edited by Cleveland Amory and Frederic Bradlee. New York: Viking, 1960. 140–43.
- Smith, Harrison, editor. *From Main Street to Stockholm: Letters of Sinclair Lewis, 1919–1930*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952.
- Yagoda, Ben. *About Town: The New Yorker and the World It Made*. New York: Scribner, 2000. ✍

Is Sinclair Lewis "Not Much Read" *continued from page 3*

They are everything" ("James Wood"). Wood is particularly severe on David Foster Wallace, who later in 2008 took his own life, citing the language in one of Wallace's stories as "hideously ugly, and rather painful for more than a page or two," that Wallace is "very good at becoming the whole of boredom" (33), and that Wallace, Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, "are to some extent old-fashioned American realists, despite their postmodern credentials: their language is mimetically full of America's language" (33). Wood wonders if they are, as such, the heirs of Sinclair Lewis, noticing that both Dreiser in *Sister Carrie* and Lewis in *Babbitt* "take care to reproduce in full the advertisements and business letters and commercial flyers they want novelistically to report on" (32). By characterizing these creations as mere reportage, the highly esteemed critic ignores the inventive, inherent satiric quality of said fictive documents. Moreover, Wood fails to

recognize what Tom Wolfe observed about Lewis in his 1989 essay, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," that going beyond his personal experience, immersing himself in and reporting on the culture of his subjects "enabled Lewis to exercise with such rich variety his insights, many of them exceptionally subtle, into the psyches of men and women, and into the status structure of society" (52).

Years later, in an irritable review of Wolfe's 2012 novel *Back to Blood*, Wood takes issue with what he understands to be Wolfe's argument in the above-mentioned essay.

[American fiction] has fallen into sterility and irrelevance, because American novelists aren't looking at the world...[that] they've retreated from the

— Is Sinclair Lewis "Not Much Read" *continued on page 15*

traditional calling of writers like Balzac, Zola, and Sinclair Lewis, because they've exchanged the labor of reporting for easy fictional games...[and that] the American novel will be reborn...when the novelist gets out onto the street and starts copying. ("Muscle-Bound")

The British-born Wood has kind words for other American writers, Marilynne Robinson and Cormac McCarthy specifically, and in *How Fiction Works* he recognizes Saul Bellow as "perhaps America's finest stylist" (192). But here's what Bellow had to say in his 1977 Jefferson Lecture, 55 years after the publication of *Babbitt*:

Lately, I have been rereading some of the books I was reading in the thirties, the novels of John Dos Passos and Scott Fitzgerald, Lewis's *Babbitt*, Dreiser's *The Titan*, Sherwood Anderson's *Mid-American Chants*. What a good idea it seemed during the Depression to write about American life, and to do with Chicago (or Manhattan or Minneapolis) what Arnold Bennett had done with the Five Towns or H. G. Wells with London. By writing novels and stories, (they) had added our American life, massive and hardly conscious of itself, to the world and its history. (118)

Having drawn his share of negative reviews from critics put off by the realism rooted in the actual people and circumstances he experienced in Chicago and New York, Bellow applies this concession of Ezra Pound as germane to himself and the aforementioned American writers:

Art very possibly *ought* to be the supreme achievement, the "accomplished," but...some books, despite their ineptitudes and lack of "accomplishment" or "form" and finish contain something for the best minds of the time, a time, any time. (119)

Evidence of Lewis's enduring importance, that his novels "contain something for the best minds of the time," at least the minds developing in college classrooms, is unmistakable, and most curiously in courses commingling fiction and nonfiction outside of English departments. Mixed blessing that it is, the Internet revealed for me the proof. *Arrowsmith* is the single work of fiction among the six required texts for a History of Science class at the University of Oklahoma, among four required texts for American Medicine in the Twentieth Century at Wayne State, and UC Davis Professor Òscar Jordà uses a passage that includes Max Gottlieb's frequent question, "Where was your control?," as an epigraph on the front pages of syllabi for his Econometrics courses. In the History department at Ohio State,

Geography department at UC Berkeley, and Interdisciplinary Studies at NYU Gallatin, *Main Street* is an assigned text. Students in classes at Oral Roberts University, Houston Baptist University, and the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary watch the film version of *Elmer Gantry*, but at the University of Oregon where excerpts of the book are read in a Literature of Skepticism course, the late Professor Frances Cogan affixed to the front of her syllabus the following admonition:

WARNING: Those with very strong beliefs may find this class upsetting. Think it over before signing up. We're going to explore skepticism about everything from feminism to religion through analysis of the texts.

Among Lewis's novels illuminating related content in multiple curricula, *Babbitt* is prominent. In Northwestern and UC Berkeley courses on urbanization, *Babbitt* is an assigned text, as it is in MIT's course on consumerism, where the novel is read along with Vance Packard's *The Status Seekers* and David Brooks's *Bobos in Paradise*. *Babbitt* accompanies online documents, video clips, and other required texts in History courses at Holy Cross and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In his reply to my e-mail query, University of Georgia professor of History Shane Hamilton attests to the novel's importance:

While the students read plenty of speeches, letters, cartoons, advertisements, and so forth in their document readers, they don't generally get much chance to dig deeply into a single carefully crafted text. *Babbitt*, of course, is especially well crafted; in a way, it is both very much a product of its time but also essentially timeless for its probing of an eternal dilemma in the human condition.

Although his students don't find the book as funny as he would like them to, Professor Hamilton thinks *Babbitt* is hilarious. So does comedian Andy Borowitz, who included a passage from the novel in his 2011 anthology, *The 50 Funniest American Writers*. Amid Mark Twain, H. L. Mencken, Dorothy Parker, Lenny Bruce, George Carlin, Molly Ivins, Larry Wilmore, and others, Lewis is in great company. No other American Nobel Laureate made the cut.

My foray into cyberspace looking for evidence of Lewis's longevity has satisfied me that his reputation is secure. There are detractors who venerate style above all, and there are writers whose jeremiads hit targets similar to those that Lewis critically assessed. But for his range, depth, and prescience, Lewis

continues to attract attention. Still, literature is a fragile entity. Browsing my copy of *It Can't Happen Here*, I came upon this description of the corporate state's college curriculum:

Students were encouraged to read, speak, and try to write modern languages, but they were not to waste their time on the so-called “literature”; reprints from recent newspapers were used instead of antiquated fiction and sentimental poetry. As regards English, some study of literature was permitted, to supply quotations for political speeches, but the chief courses were in advertising, party journalism, and business correspondence, and no authors before 1800 might be mentioned, except Shakespeare and Milton. (251)

By any chance, does this passage call to mind certain parts of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy?

Works Cited

- Bellow, Saul. “The Jefferson Lectures.” *It All Adds Up: From the Dim Past to the Uncertain Future*. New York: Viking, 1994. 117–52.
- Cogan, Frances. Literature of Skepticism Syllabus. Clark Honors College, University of Oregon, 2012, honors.uoregon.edu/class/literature-skepticism-0. Accessed Mar. 24, 2016.
- Hamilton, Shane. Email to the author. Feb. 10, 2015.
- “James Wood Objects to Descriptions of His Book But Does Not Deny He is Raising an Army.” *Vulture* July 24, 2008. www.vulture.com/2008/07/james_wood_objects_to_our_desc.html. Accessed Mar. 20, 2016.
- Jordà, Òscar. Econometrics Syllabus. University of California, Davis, 2008, faculty.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/jorda/class/140/W08/Sylla08. Accessed Mar. 24, 2016.
- Lesser, Wendy. Review of *The Republic of Imagination* by Azar Nafisi. *New York Times Book Review* Nov. 23, 2014. 33.
- Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1922.
- . *It Can't Happen Here*. New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1935.
- . “Sinclair Lewis, from *Babbitt*.” *The 50 Funniest American Writers*: An Anthology of Humor from Mark Twain to The Onion*, edited by Andy Borowitz. New York: Library of America, 2011. 27–48.
- Nafisi, Azar. *The Republic of Imagination: America in Three Books*. New York: Viking, 2014.
- Threepenny Review*. Spring 2015.
- Wolfe, Tom. “Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast: A Literary Manifesto for the New Social Novel.” *Harper's Magazine* Nov. 1989: 45–56.
- Wood, James. *How Fiction Works*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.
- . “Muscle-Bound.” Review of *Back to Blood*, by Tom Wolfe. *New Yorker* Oct. 15, 2012. 80–85. ✍

immigrants—but the fictional characters often go further and scarier. Lindbergh moves Jews from urban centers into the rural heartland through an ominous Office of American Absorption, leaving them vulnerable to anti-Semitic violence. Windrip creates concentration camps for dissidents; establishes a sham judiciary; and bars black Americans from voting, holding public office, practicing law or medicine, or teaching beyond grammar school. “Nothing so elevates a dispossessed farmer or a factory worker on relief,” Jessup realizes, “as to have some race, any race, on which he can look down....”

The editor's son in *It Can't Happen Here* and the genial rabbi in *The Plot Against America* make their choices, finding accommodation with their new leaders mainly out of self-interest. As Jessup grows radicalized in his opposition to Windrip, his son feigns concern, warning Jessup that he's going to get into trouble if he keeps opposing local Corps. But soon Philip's motive emerges: The government is offering him an assistant military judgeship, he admits, and

the appointment could suffer over his father's intransigence. Rabbi Bengelsdorf, meanwhile, reaches the highest ranks of the Lindbergh administration, the token Jewish adviser, counseling the first lady and running the Office of American Absorption....

This bond is also found in fictional accounts of American dictatorship. A fascinating character in *It Can't Happen Here* is Shad Ledue, handyman for the Jessups, an uneducated white laborer whom the family looks down upon but who exacts revenge when he acquires power—not much, just enough—under the Corps. “I suppose you think I had a swell time when I was your hired man!” Shad says to Jessup, after overseeing the execution of the editor's son-in-law following a sham legal proceeding. “Watching you and your old woman and the girls go off on a picnic while I—oh, I was just your hired man, with dirt in my ears, your dirt!”

Jessup, a self-described “small-town bourgeois Intellectual,” espoused all the appropriate theoretical sympathies for the working class but long regarded Shad as a fool he must civilize. He saw him every day, but never knew him, never understood what he could become. “With all the justified discontent there is against the smart politicians and the Plush Horses of Plutocracy—oh, if it hadn’t been one Windrip, it’d been another...” Jessup muses later. “We had it coming, we Respectables.”

The options for opponents of the strongman are clear: fight or flight. Jessup hopes his traditional journalism can make a difference; he continues writing editorials that “would excite 3 per cent of his readers from breakfast time till noon and by 6 p.m. be eternally forgotten.” But as the ruthlessness of the Corps becomes clear, he joins an underground resistance group, producing leaflets in clandestine publishing

shops, and even fantasizes about murdering Shad. He doesn’t go through with it; others do...

* * *

Even now, whether or not Trump wins this election, whether or not he builds his walls and subverts our laws, he has set loose passions and compelled choices that will long mark us. If the politics he represents take deeper root, as in so many other nations and times, tweeting #NeverTrump or slapping a “Don’t Blame Me, I Voted for Hillary” sticker on the car will offer little solace. And the man promising to make America great again will have succeeded in rendering America, finally and conclusively, unexceptional.

Go to washingtonpost.com/news/book-party/wp/2016/06/09/how-does-donald-trump-stack-up-against-american-literatures-fictional-dictators-pretty-well-actually/ for the full article. ✍

Quote 7: “She had a record on the phonograph; Dave Dyer was capering in the center of the floor, loose-jointed, lean, small, rusty-headed, pointed of nose, clapping his hands and shouting, “Swing y’ pardners—**alamun lef!**”” (74–75).

Q: “Alamun lef” means gentlemen left?

A: This is a dialectical spelling for *allemande left*, a movement in American square dancing where two facing dancers take left hands, turn halfway around to the left, let go, and then step forward.

Quote 8: “A broad stairway led from the street to the upper hall, along which were the doors of a lawyer’s office, a dentist’s, a photographer’s ‘studio,’ the lodge-rooms of the **Affiliated Order of Spartans** and, at the back, the Perrys’ apartment” (152).

Q: “Affiliated Order of Spartans”?

A: This is a made-up fraternal order. Lewis is making fun of the multiplicity of them in such a small town.

Quote 9: “‘Well, all right, but you call me earlier, next time. Look here, Barney, you better install a ’phone—telephone **haben**. Some of you Dutchmen will be dying one of these days before you can fetch the doctor’” (177).

Q: “Haben”? What does it mean?

A: *Haben* is a verb form of the German “to have.” There are a lot of German immigrants in central Minnesota so occasionally German words creep into conversation.

Quote 10: “Nice way to fix things, all right. What do you say we go down to Jack Elder’s and have **a game of five hundred** this afternoon?” (195).

Q: Does this mean they have to play the whole afternoon or is “a game of five hundred” the name of a kind of poker?

A: Five Hundred is a trick-taking game that was popular in the United States in the first part of the twentieth century. It was later eclipsed by bridge in popularity, although it is still played.

Quote 11: “Toward the end of July he proposed, ‘Say, the **Beavers** are holding a convention in Joralemon, street fair and everything. We might go down tomorrow. And I’d like to see Dr. Calibree about some business. Put in the whole day. Might help some to make up for our trip. Fine fellow, Dr. Calibree’” (301).

Q: Origin of the “Beaver” organization?

A: There have been a number of fraternal orders called the Beavers. The earliest, the Fraternal Order of Beavers, was created in 1911. Their rituals are supposedly connected to Native American rituals. This organization, like the others, was primarily social in nature, although they also supported some building and loan associations.

Quote 12: “Carol was in a low chair, framed and haloed by the window behind her, an image in pale gold. The baby curled in her lap, his head on her arm, listening with gravity while she sang from **Gene Field**” (311).

Q: Who is Gene Field?

Translation and Culture *continued from page 17*

A: Eugene Field was an American writer in the last half of the 19th century. He was known for his children's poetry, the most famous poem being "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod."

Quote 13: "It's so much more complicated than any of you know—so much more complicated than I knew when I put on **Ground Grippers** and started out to reform the world" (440).

Q: What does "Ground Grippers" mean?

A: *Ground Grippers* is a slang term for shoes, especially new ones.

Quote 14: "She found pictures of New England streets: the dignity of Falmouth, the charm of Concord, Stockbridge and Farmington and Hillhouse Avenue. The fairy-book suburb of Forest Hills on Long Island. **Devonshire cottages and Essex**

manors and a Yorkshire High Street and Port Sunlight. The Arab village of Djeddah—an intricately chased jewel-box. A town in California which had changed itself from the barren brick fronts and slatternly frame sheds of a Main Street to a way which led the eye down a vista of arcades and gardens" (130–31).

Q: Are they local names? I maybe need to make notes so that I can highlight the international characteristics of the novel.

A: The reference is to houses that are built to look like those in a British village. The idea is that American architecture is boring and functional, so architects are looking to houses from other parts of the world to make the houses more interesting looking. ✍

* All page numbers are from the original edition of *Main Street* (1920).

What Were They Reading Then *continued from page 9*

Once young Crispin finds out, he blows out his brains. Dunbar and Hesther can now be united in marriage. And Harkness has finally come to life, learned about love, and discovered that he is capable of action and friendship. A happy ending to a very weird story.

A reviewer for the *Milwaukee Journal* wrote, "It has all the earmarks of a hair-raising dime novel doctored up with a bit of psychology and somewhat discolored by daubs of sentimental philosophy. What charm it possesses lies in the craftsmanship of Mr. Walpole as a purveyor of words" (Oct. 22, 1925, 29). ✍

DEPARTMENTS

SINCLAIR LEWIS QUERIES

Q: This afternoon at a book sale here in Copenhagen, I bought a copy of Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* (Macmillan & Co., 1926) with a dedication to Frances Hackett from Sinclair Lewis. The dedication reads: "To Francis Hackett with the affection of Fritz L. Creisly [I can't quite read this signature] & Sinclair Lewis London Feb. 4, 1931." The first part of the dedication seems to be in the hand of Creisly, while Lewis's signature and the date are in his own hand.

I know a little of Frances Hackett and his relation to Lewis, but I'm unacquainted with Fritz L. Creisly. Perhaps you can enlighten me? An interesting association with Thomas Browne since he is, of course, alluded to in *Main Street*. And very curious that it should end up here in Copenhagen.

A: What a very cool find. I don't really know anything about Creisly. I checked a couple of Lewis biographies, and although Hackett is mentioned as being one of Lewis's friends

(and probably drinking buddies) during the period he lived in Greenwich Village from around 1910–15, Creisly is not. Hackett later wrote for the *New Republic* (where he reviewed *The Job*). Since Hackett was originally from Ireland and spent a lot of time in Europe despite sojourns to the United States, it wouldn't be surprising that he and Lewis would run into each other in London. In late 1930 Lewis had accepted the Nobel Prize in Copenhagen and then spent Christmas 1930 in Berlin. After that he went to London and was at ends, not having a book project. The day after the dedication, Lewis met Thomas Wolfe. He stayed in London through the beginning of March.



Q: From the Studio Theatre of Bath, Maine: I would like to do a public reading of the play version of *It Can't Happen Here*. I'm not sure who controls the rights at the present time but would not want to do the reading without the proper permission. Can you provide some direction regarding with whom I need to be in touch?

A: Currently McIntosh & Otis, the literary agents for the Lewis estate, handle the rights. Contact Amelia Appel at 212-687-7400 or aappel@mcintoshandotis.com for more information.



Thanks so much for your immediate response and the fascinating newsletter which is very attractive and inspiring and covering many aspects of SL's work which I find extremely interesting. And good to see in references and quoted literature that good old Adorno et al. are not forgotten—even in the United States! I shall certainly look forward to reading your next issue. Meanwhile I shall try to look deeper into the “philobatical” aspects of SL. As you probably know, the psychoanalyst Ballin worked with assumptions that people always on the move and looking for adventurous experiences were “philobates,” whereas object-fixated persons sticking to a fixed address and a home as a steadfast base were “okno-philites.” Of course SL fits into the philobate category, but this view has to be illustrated and proven by his work. What I also find fascinating about Lewis is how attached he was to the motorcar, enjoying all these car trips and excursions and at the same time being aware of cars as status symbols, etc. His first car was a Model T and much later he bought a Cadillac after a hefty payment for the *Babbitt* ms, I think. Anyway SL is such a fascinating, and at the same time irritating, author that Schorer's basically critical view should be seen in relation to some extremely outrageous performances/reactions of SL following periods of benevolent and magnanimous graciousness. Nowadays some psychologists might call SL a “manic depressive.” His books are not outdated, and his life was a tremendous adventure, inspiring many other authors to follow in his footsteps.

SINCLAIR LEWIS NOTES

Sinclair Lewis's old Summit Avenue home in St. Paul was on sale for \$1.1 million, reported Michael Rietmulder, April 12, 2016, at citypages.com.

According to the Edina Realty listing, Lewis lived and wrote in the Italian Renaissance-style house at 516 Summit Ave. in 1917. The four-bedroom abode is appropriately regal, littered with mahogany woodwork, brick and marble, and five fireplaces. It's suitable for a guy whose face was on a stamp once. Almost as brag-worthy is that the 4,800-square-foot mini-mansion was built by Butler Brothers Construction, which built the State Capitol.

For more pictures of this gorgeous house and the complete story, go to citypages.com. A photo tour of the house is available.



Irina Popescu from *Romania-Insider.com* reports that the “taxi company Meridian Taxi and Litera publishing house recently launched a cultural project in Bucharest, called The Mobile Library (Biblioteca mobila).”

Meridian Taxi clients will find books in the company's cars, which they can browse during the trip. The books, such as *Too Much Happiness* by Alice Munro, the *Lady with the Dog* by Chekhov, and *Babbitt* by Sinclair Lewis, belong to Litera publishing house. The books will be changed on a monthly basis.

“The Mobile Library is an innovative concept, which offers passengers the opportunity to read a few pages to the destination. We hope that our initiative will be well received by Meridian Taxi clients,” said Lucian Marin, executive manager Meridian Taxi, cited by local Mediafax.

The project aims to encourage reading, turning every moment and place into an opportunity to read.

[Thanks to Jessica Wozniak for drawing this to the newsletter's attention.]



Euan Kerr (*The Thread*, produced by Minnesota Public Radio News, May 8, 2016) writes in “*Lord Grizzly: Celebrating a Minnesota Literary Classic*” that “Long before the movie *The Revenant* there was *Lord Grizzly*. In 1954 Minnesota writer Frederick Manfred published *Lord Grizzly*, a novel based on the epic, true tale of frontier scout Hugh Glass.”

“At first they thought this new movie *The Revenant* was based on Dad's books,” said Freya Manfred, Frederick's daughter and a poet in her own right. “And they soon realized it was based on the other book, *The Revenant* book. So that was very sad for all of us.”

The creation of *Lord Grizzly* is a tale in itself. Freya Manfred says her father, who died in 1994, loved classical myths, but felt America should have its myths too. “And one of them would be the story of this astonishing real person who was mauled by a grizzly bear, and crawled 200 miles across very dangerous territory, to safety and to get revenge,” said Manfred...

[Tom Pope, Freya Manfred's husband, said that] “Fred Manfred took researching the book to extremes,” first reading some sixty books and other accounts of frontier life in the 1820s. He then strapped

a make-shift splint on his leg, which Glass must have done after the grizzly shattered his limb, and began crawling around his back yard in Bloomington to see what that was like. And then there was the challenge of food. Unarmed, Hugh Glass could only eat what he could grab with his hands, so Pope says Fred Manfred did that, too," including ants, mice, grub worms, and grasshoppers.

Frederick Manfred read a eulogy at Sinclair Lewis's funeral in 1951 in Sauk Centre.



Insidious Foes: The Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front, by Francis MacDonnell (Oxford UP, 1995; rev. ed. Lyons, 2004) has a long discussion about *It Can't Happen Here*. MGM planned to film a movie of it in 1936, with Lionel Barrymore as Doremus Jessup. After "Joseph Breen of the Production Code Administration warned Louis B. Mayer that *It Can't Happen Here* was likely to cause considerable controversy overseas" (31), studio head Louis B. Mayer shelved the production. Sinclair Lewis called it "a fantastic exhibition of folly and cowardice." Sales of the book increased and by the end of 1936, *It Can't Happen Here* was the fifth best-selling novel of the year, over a year after the novel was originally published. Although many reviews, like the characters in the novel, felt that it couldn't happen here, Clifton Fadiman, a reviewer for the *New Yorker*, proclaimed "It can happen here. Read Lewis's book and find out how."



In the 1941 comedy *Honeymoon for Three*, which starred Ann Sheridan and George Brent, there is a character who names her children after famous authors with the expectation that the author would come to the christening of the child named after him or her. So far, she says, Booth Tarkington and Elinor Glynn have obliged. When noted writer Kenneth Bixby (Brent) refuses the honor, she retorts that if he doesn't want the honor, "maybe Sinclair Lewis will."



In a review essay about Bob Hope and the biography *Hope* by Richard Zoglin (Simon & Schuster, 2014) in the November 17, 2014 issue of the *New Yorker*, Adam Gopnik compares Hope to Lewis's George Babbitt. "Laugh Factory: How Bob Hope Made a Career in Comedy" (82–87) explores how Hope went from a brash, fast-talking outsider and eager song-and-dance man to the consummate insider, supporter of Nixon and the Vietnam War. Gopnik notes, "Hope was entirely

a city smart-aleck. (It was already an American voice, right out of Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*)" (84). From 1939 to 1950 Hope was truly funny, often paired with Bing Crosby in a series of road movies, starting with *The Road to Morocco* in 1940. "He's the true American Babbitt: good-natured, ignorant, forever optimistic, his understanding of the universe limited to a tiny range of insular referents" (85). Although many people only remember the later, lamentable Hope, Gopnik and Zoglin encourage a reappraisal, especially of his early work. As Gopnik concludes, "You've got to love him, some," if only for the "two wonderful tunes written especially for him: Frank Loesser's 'Two Sleepy People' and Leo Robin's 'Thanks for the Memory'" (87).



Rodney P. Rice's "The Undiscovered Country: Leif Enger's *Peace Like a River* and Midwestern Magical Realism" (*MidAmerica* 42 (2015): 22–35) focuses on the 2001 novel written by Leif Enger, who was also born in Sauk Centre. "Whereas Garland and Lewis devoted the bulk of their attention to the poverty, drudgery, loneliness, and smallmindedness of rural America. . . Enger is attempting to nudge Midwestern literature in a new direction in order to peer beyond conventional, commonplace definitions of reality in order to reveal uncommon, alternate perspectives about human happiness and understanding" (22–23). Enger employs magic realism in his presentation of rural communities in Minnesota with "disempowered white people who exist on the fringes of Midwestern small-town America" (25).



Robert McParland's *Beyond Gatsby: How Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Writers of the 1920s Shaped American Culture* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) is a breezy overview of novelists of the 1920s and their times. He is especially focused on "the contexts that the novels of the 1920s offer for our present debates." The book is divided into seven sections: the post-World War I world; the rivalry of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald; Faulkner and other southern writers; modernism and popular fiction; Midwestern voices; city writers such as Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, Anzia Yezierska, and Langston Hughes; and novelists who create myth such as Edith Wharton, Stephen Vincent Benét, and John Steinbeck. McParland weaves history, popular culture, and politics into his discussions, peppered with many rhetorical questions and too many declarative sentences. This book could serve as an introduction to an era, especially for the nonspecialist. One chapter, "Midwestern Vision and Values: Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Willa Cather," has a section on Lewis, "Sinclair Lewis, America's First Nobel Prize Winner," with basic plot

summaries and publication and reception information on *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, and *Elmer Gantry*.



John Funchion, in “Left Nostalgia: Revolutionary Aesthetics in the Radical Novel,” pp. 134-72 in *Novel Nostalgias: The Aesthetics of Antagonism in Nineteenth-Century US Literature* (Ohio State, 2015), discusses Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* and Frank Harris’s *The Bomb* through the lens of left nostalgia, which “reanimates the revolutionary past to serve the exigencies of the present.” The essay is more context than literary analysis, but Funchion contends that the call for action in each, the commitment to socialism by Jurgis Rudkus in *The Jungle* and the need for violent revolt and the literal throwing of a bomb in Harris’s novel, continues to resonate through contemporary revolutionary politics. The essay quotes an article, “The Passing of Capitalism,” that Sinclair Lewis wrote for the *Bookman* magazine in 1914 in which he proclaimed: “the pure individualism of Wharton and James and Howells is out of the trend.” Readers now want novels that provided “a complete criticism of life today—and in them one finds back of all the individual’s actions a lowering background of People—people with clenched fists.” Funchion notes “Lewis outlined a canon of radicals that included still familiar names, such as Theodore Dreiser and Jack London, and now largely forgotten ones, such as Will Levington Comfort and Susan Glaspell. He did not affix a generic label to this body of literature, but he characterized it as political committed naturalism or a variation of socialism that rejected determinism and individualism. Reviewers reaffirmed Lewis’s conspectus by registering socialist sympathies in many of the major works of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century US literature” (148–49).



Ideal, a novel written by Ayn Rand in the early 1930s, was not published until 2015, along with the script of a play version that was never produced (a straight to video version was produced in 2004 with Sharon Gless as the narrator and Janne Peters as Kay Gonda). In “Ayn Rand’s Deadly, Unpublished Early Novel Illuminates—And Unsettles,” a review of *Ideal* by Rand’s biographer Anne Heller (*Time* July 20, 2015: 57–58), Heller notes that people in this novel and others by Rand, these “squalid American types, based in part on Rand’s reading of Nietzsche and Sinclair Lewis and in larger part on a Russian-Jewish horror of social and political majorities of any kind, filled her novels and essays until her death.” The unsavory plot focuses on famous actress Kay Gonda who has dinner with a millionaire who is found dead later that evening.

She visits six of her fans, telling each that she has committed the murder, and asking for their help. All but one refuses or plots to turn her in, except the last one, who commits suicide and leaves a note saying that he killed the millionaire. It turns out that Gonda is innocent and the millionaire killed himself. When confronted with the deception by her publicist, she said that it “was the kindest thing I have ever done.”

SAUK CENTRE NEWS

Laura Hintzen, in “Restoration of Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home” (*Sauk Centre Herald*, Sept. 15, 2016: A3), writes that the Sinclair Lewis Foundation received a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society to assess the condition of the Boyhood Home and make recommendations on its upkeep and preservation. Foundation members Roberta Olson and Jim Umhoefer met with architect Stephanie Howe and engineer Bryan Asch to tour the home and take measurements and photographs prior to the final report. Currently the Foundation is replacing the home’s furnace and adding air conditioning; the work is being done by Trisko Plumbing and Heating. Contributions are still being accepted for the project. Call Jim Umhoefer at 320-352-2735 for more information.



The 2016 Sinclair Lewis Writers’ Conference took place in Sauk Centre on October 8, 2016, and featured James Bradley, author of the best-seller *Flags of Our Fathers*, about the battle of Iwo Jima and the iconic picture of American servicemen raising the flag. In addition, he has written *Flyboys*, about the Pacific air war; *The Imperial Cruise*; and *The China Mirage*. Other speakers included Claudia Schmidt, a musical performer and storyteller, highly praised by Garrison Keillor; Larry Watson, author of a poetry chapbook and a number of novels, including *Montana 1948*, *White Crosses*, and *American Boy*; and Dave Simpkins, editor and publisher of the *Sauk Centre Herald* and author of an upcoming book on Sinclair Lewis’s early years.



The annual Sinclair Lewis Days was held July 13–17, 2016, and although there was little Sinclair Lewis about it, except for a front-page article in the *Gopher Prairie Gazette* by Dave Simpkins about Lewis’s literary legacy, it was a great celebration of small-town life, with a Miss Sauk Centre Pageant, a pie and ice cream social, a Sinclair Lewis Days Treasure Hunt, a craft fair and flea market, and various kinds of entertainment.

The Sinclair Lewis Conference in 2017 coincides with Sinclair Lewis Days, so attendees will be able to celebrate as well.



From the *Sauk Centre Herald*, May 26, 2016: A6. Dave Simpkins wrote “Following Minnesota’s Paper Trail” of a visit he and his wife took to “the Minnesota Historical Center’s rare book and manuscript collection led by curator Pat Coleman...”



(Photo courtesy of Dave Simpkins)

There are books by James Hendryx, son of *Sauk Centre Herald* editor Charles Hendryx, Sauk Centre’s “other” popular writer who wrote 50 novels and 100 short stories about wilderness and wild west adventures. Hendryx said he was paid a penny a word for what he wrote and Lewis was paid a dollar per word.

Hendryx has had the last laugh since his rare books are more collected than Lewis’s books.

There is also a first-edition copy of Lewis’s *Main Street* in the museum with Lewis’s inscription and a self-portrait of the Nobel Prize winning author.

My favorite piece was a movie poster for *Free Air* based on Lewis’s book by the same name. Lewis and his wife, Gracie, spent the best part of the summer of 1916 in Sauk Centre. They bought a Model T Ford and camera, then set out from Sauk Centre to San Francisco, gathering material for the book which is said to be America’s first road novel.

There was also a movie poster from Lewis’s *Elmer Gantry*, which premiered in Sauk Centre and was rated “adults only.”

Simpkins’s article talks about some of the 500,000 books and over 50,000 maps that the Historical Center has, including maps based on interviews with missionaries and explorers, with the oldest drawn in 1581. He also mentions the conservation laboratory, a brothel guide to St. Paul, and Lewis and Clark books written by members of the 1803 expedition.



In “The Scoop on Butter Days” (*Sauk Centre Herald*, June 9, 2016, B4), part of historian Jill Abahsain’s continuing feature *Unpacking Our Past*, the origins of the tradition of Sauk Centre festival royalty is traced. Unlike the beauty queen pageants of other towns and cities, Sauk Centre’s tradition can be traced back to pre-Christian Europe and the selection of a

young woman to represent the local farming community and the wish for a bounteous harvest. Although churches held harvest celebrations in America, the tradition of a young woman representing a town’s most important agricultural product dates to the early twentieth century. The Sauk Centre Butter Queen celebration dates from 1949 and included a butter churning contest. Butter Days were renamed Sinclair Lewis Days in 1968 to mark the designation of the Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home as a National Historic Landmark. This celebration, which includes a parade, a pie social, races, craft fairs, and lots of entertainment, as well as the Miss Sauk Centre pageant, has continued every year since then.



Sauk Centre featured on *Postcards: Downtown Mural*, Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home, Tutti Fruitti Featured by Jennifer Coyne
Sauk Centre Herald

In its seventh season, Pioneer Public Television’s *Postcards* traveled to Sauk Centre. *Postcards* is a weekly television series that exemplifies art, culture and history in rural Minnesota. For the past 50 years, Pioneer Public Television—based out of Appleton, Minn.—has been serving the communities of southwest and west central Minnesota, northwestern Iowa, eastern South Dakota, and southeastern North Dakota.

“We haven’t explored Sauk Centre before,” said videographer and editor Kristofor Gieske. “There is a surprising amount of variety here, more than we expected.” Gieske is originally from Sauk Centre. Within each episode, the crew typically travels to three different locations in order to find unique stories that encompass art, culture and history of a rural Minnesota region. Luckily, *Postcards* was able to find all three within Sauk Centre as they learned more about the town mural, Sinclair Lewis Boyhood Home, and Tutti Fruitti Market.

“When we thought about visiting Sauk Centre, it was relatively simple to decide what we would focus on,” Gieske said. Several individuals were interviewed during the summer of 2015, such as Dave Simpkins, Roger Reinardy, and Marlene Gwost, to add authenticity and value to the episode. “As a person of Sauk Centre, touring these places and hearing about them recalled the memories I had as a child,” Gieske said. “I hope people will watch and maybe learn something they didn’t know about our community.”

Gieske believes viewers will find great interest in the episode and be provided with a unique look into the arts, culture and history of Sauk Centre.

[The show is available for online viewing at www.pioneer.org/postcards. Article originally published Feb. 18, 2016.]

—Collector's Corner features catalog listings from book dealers as a sampling of what publications by Lewis are selling for currently. [Thanks to Jacqueline Koenig for her contributions to this section.]



COLLECTOR'S
CORNER

Sawtooth Books

1035 West Tequila Street, Boise, ID 83702
Phone: (208) 426-0661
E-mail: sawtoothbooks@gmail.com
www.sawtoothbooks.com

SUMMER 2016 SALE

36. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920. \$300.

Original dark blue cloth lettered in orange. The first state with correct type on pages 54 and 387. A very good copy with wear to the extremities and head and foot of the spine. This copy is inscribed by Lewis on a bound-in leaf preceding the half-title page: "To Charles Wayne Collins, scribo ergo sum. Sinclair Lewis, Pittsburgh, Dec. 12. 1929." The front free endpaper bears the ownership signature of Louise Fautaux as well as her bookplate. Book comes with a facsimile dust jacket, as the original dust jacket is absent.

Robert Dagg Rare Books

3288 21st Street, #176, San Francisco, CA 94110
Phone: (415) 821-2825
E-mail: mail@daggrarebooks.com
www.daggrarebooks.com

APRIL MISCELLANY 2016

75. Lewis, Sinclair. *The Innocents*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917. \$6500.

First edition. A fine tight book in a very good example of the scarce dust jacket. New price sticker of "\$1.50" over original price on spine panel. A few tiny chips at extremities, some overall soiling with rubbing along joints, front flap fold beginning to split in two places. Despite minor flaws an attractive example of a scarce jacket with only minimal paper loss.

76. —. *Ann Vickers*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1933. \$450.

First edition. A fine copy in dust jacket, with absolutely none of the usual tanning to the spine panel, and with only an invisible closed tear at top of spine panel. An exceptional copy of this novel, published in the relatively small first edition of 2350 copies.

PBA Galleries

1233 Sutter Street, San Francisco, CA 94109
Phone: (415) 989-2665 Fax: (415) 989-1664
E-mail: info@pbagalleries.com
www.pbagalleries.com

SALE 584

236. —. *Gideon Planish*. New York: Random House, 1943. \$156.

Original cloth, dust jacket. First edition.

Signed by the author on front free endpaper. "Mr. Lewis turns his devastating analysis to uplifters, do-gooders, lecturers, professional philanthropists, committee maniacs, public-dinner presidents, microphone hounds—all rolled into one man" (from jacket). Jacket lightly chipped; fine in a very good jacket.

Joseph the Provider Books Bought & Sold

P.O. Box 90, Santa Barbara, CA 93102
Phone: (805) 683-2603
E-mail: joe@silcom.com

LIST 80

104. Lewis, Sinclair. *Main Street: The Story of Carol Kennicott*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1921. \$275.

First edition, seventeenth printing. This copy is boldly inscribed by the author on the front free endpaper: "To V. P. Newmark from the striking face portrayed opposite—Sinclair Lewis." The "striking face portrayed opposite" is a photograph of Lewis that is mounted to the front pastedown. With the recipient's ownership signature ("Valentine P. Newmark") on the back endpaper and his occasional underlining and marginal notes to the first quarter of the text. A very good copy. Hardcover.

Join Today...

WE INVITE YOU TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY.

MEMBERS RECEIVE A SUBSCRIPTION TO THE *SINCLAIR LEWIS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER*.

PLEASE CHOOSE A CATEGORY BELOW:

- | | |
|--|---|
| A. <input type="checkbox"/> \$60 ⁰⁰ sustaining member | D. <input type="checkbox"/> \$10 ⁰⁰ student/retiree membership |
| B. <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 ⁰⁰ family/joint membership | E. <input type="checkbox"/> \$60 ⁰⁰ institutional member |
| C. <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 ⁰⁰ individual member | F. <input type="checkbox"/> Additional donation to the Society \$_____ |

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip Code _____ E-mail Address _____

Send form, along with check, to: The Sinclair Lewis Society, Box 4240, English Dept., Illinois State University,
Normal, IL 61790-4240

The Sinclair Lewis Society
4240/Dept. of English
Illinois State University
Normal, IL 61790-4240